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ABSTRACT

A step-by-step explanation is provided of SOLVE (Solutions, Outcomes, Liabilities, Values, and Evaluations), a method for resolving moral problems to satisfy others as well as the individual conscience. As indicated in introductory comments, SOLVE separates moral dilemmas into their constituent parts. Each moral problem has a number of "solutions"; each solution produces certain "outcomes" or consequences; solutions often require us to sustain certain losses or "liabilities"; each solution upholds particular "values" (e.g., principles of human worth, nonmaleficence, autonomy, justice, lawfulness, confidentiality, veracity, role/duty, and fidelity) while compromising other values; and each "evaluation" produces a decision about the worth and feasibility of each solution. After explaining the components of the SOLVE approach, a hypothetical case is presented, followed by worksheets; a discussion of relevant issues related to solutions, outcomes, liabilities, values, and evaluation; and five sample solutions. Following a summary of conclusions about the case, five additional practice cases are presented. (UCM)

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How to SOLVE a Moral Problem:

A Guide to Moral Decision-making

by

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How To SOLVE A Moral Problem

Moral problems are extremely complex matters. A business man faces a moral issue that involves a variety of possible solutions; each solution produces a variety of possible outcomes, liabilities and values. Businessmen are under fire by society, the courts and their peers to act morally. Today's businessman needs a method for resolving moral problems to satisfy others as well as to satisfy his own conscience. This method should provide him a means of defending his decision to outsiders. The following formula separates moral dilemmas into their constitutient parts. This formula is characterized in the handy acronym SOLVE:

Solutions: A moral problem has a variety of solutions. Each solution is written at the top of a sheet of paper.

Outcomes: Each solution produces certain outcomes or consequences. The outcomes of each solution are written under the solution producing it.

Liabilities: Solutions often require us to sustain certain losses or liabilities. A solution may require funds or services not normally provided. These liabilities are the nonmoral costs incurred by a particular solution. Under the outcomes note the liabilities for each solution.

Values: Each solution upholds particular values while compromising other values. For example, one solution might require me to lie to protect someone else's life; the value of truth-telling is compromised while the value of human worth is upheld. Values upheld and compromised are listed for each solution after liabilities.

Evaluations: An evaluation produces a decision about the worth and feasibility of each solution. Outcomes, liabilities and values are weighed to reach a decision telling us whether or not to follow a particular solution.

The purpose of SOLVE is to divide a complex moral problem into manageable parts. The solutions are placed side-by-side so that outcomes, liabilities and values can be easily compared; evaluations are made and fair decisions are reached.

I shall explain each step in detail. Then I shall provide samples of the worksheets explaining the ramifications of each solution. Lastly, I shall provide written summary of the decision process. Let us examine the following case to see how SOLVE works.

THE CASE OF GILLMAN'S LIBRARY

Mr. Gillman is the scheduling officer at a university library. The president asks him to keep the library open until 1 a.m. every day during the week of final examinations. The burden of keeping the library open the extra hours falls upon his staff of part-time student assistants who are asked to work the 10 p.m. to 1 a.m. shift. Now Gillman has seven assistants and since he must maintain the added hours for seven days, he reasons that each student should be asked to work each one of the late night shifts. However, three of his charges are women who believe that they run a grater risk than the men of being molested on the way to their cars so late at night. Consequently, they ask to be exempted from the extra duty. The men complain about having to make up the extra duties simply because they are men. The men argue that if the women are receiving the same amount of pay, they should be required to fulfill the same obligations. What should Gillman do about this circumstance?

SOLVE Worksheet

SOLUTIONS:

OUTCOMES:

LIABILITIES:

VALUES:

POS NEG

EVALUATIONS:

Solutions: Moral reasoning is an effort to find an agreeable and defendable solution to a moral problem--a conflict of values. So the first step in moral reasoning is to generate possible solutions to the conflict. I recommend that the decision--maker brain storm for solutions, taking note of each solution that comes to mind no matter how bizzare a solution seems at first. Each solution is written at the top of a sheet of paper. The outcomes, liabilities, values and evaluations of each solution are noted below the solution. (See SOLVE worksheet on page.)

(Note: First, avoid limiting yourself to two solutions. One is easily trapped into the stagnant thought that solutions are contradictory pairs: to do or not to do, to buy or not to buy, to blow the whistle or to not blow the whistle. For example, one might decide to consult colleagues or legal counsel before blowing the whistle. There are usually a large variety of solutions if the problem is studied long enough. Second, one should always consider the solution of doing nothing. This solution contains outcomes, liabilities, values and must be evaluated like any other solution).

Let us see what solutions occur in our test case:

Several solutions to Gillman's problem immediately come to mind. (1) Gillman might do nothing, simply scheduling the women to work without regard to their concerns. (2) Gillman might instead make the men take up the slack and work the late hours. (3) He might have an extra person to work all of the extra evening hours. (4) He might double the employees on the late shift so they can care for each other after work. (5) He might get the campus security guard to walk the women to their cars at night.

(Since each solution is recorded at the top of its own sheet of paper, our five solutions with their outcomes, liabilities, values and evaluations are noted on five separate sheets of paper: see the completed SOLVE worksheets on pages 9-13.)

Outcomes: Solutions have particular outcomes or consequences: if I do this--that will occur. Each solution has one or more outcomes. This is a time for brainstorming all of the possible consequences of any action we might take. We do not make moral judgments at this stage; all valuative language--such as "good", "bad", and "ought"--is not to be included in a description of outcomes. (Note: One should again avoid listing outcomes in contradictory pairs. Outcomes should note the ramifications of any one solution.)

Notice the first solution: Gillman ought to do nothing, simply make the women work their late hours. One outcome is that an employee might be attacked and hurt; someone might even be killed. Another outcome is that one or more employees might resign. Perhaps nothing will occur.

Examine the second solution: Gillman might make the men work the late hours. Here we assume that the women's concerns are met and they are satisfied with the solution. Still, a likely outcome is that one or more of the men might quit, since they do not want to be overly burdened by the late hours.

In the third solution Gillman hires an extra person. This solution works if a man applies and is hired for the job but fails if a woman is hired.

The forth solution, that Gillman might double the number of employees working the late shift, has yet a different outcome. Doubling the employees provides protection for the women but increases the burden for all employees and doubles Gillman's costs for that time period.

The fifth solution suggests that Gillman arrange to have the campus security guard escort the women to their cars after work. The outcome to this solution is that the women may safely perform their tasks and the men will not have to work any extra late shifts. No extra cost is incurred by the library because the campus police are on call for any contingencies that might arise campus wide.

Liabilities: Not all values are moral values. The value of my wrist watch is ten dollars, but $10 is not a moral value. The category of Liabilities, represented by the L in SOLVE, provides us with an opportunity to note whatever nonmoral values are at stake in any given solution.

Sometimes the morally best solutions are restrictive for nonmoral reasons. In the business world nonmoral restrictions are usually economic: a solution is morally beneficial yet financially restrictive. But money is not the only nonmoral limitation.

For example, a solution dictates that I report my company's immoral waste disposal practice to the EPA.

A likely outcome is that I would lose my job. The personal cost of my job loss describes the liabilities of this solution. I might, for instance, note the difficulties incurred by my family, should I be fired.

(Note: Be aware that not every solution has nonmoral liabilities; there are times where I shall note "none" to fill the category of liabilities in my analysis. Indeed, the ideal solutions have no liabilities .)

Notice that the fourth solution has a nonmoral liability: doubling the number of employees costs more money. Gillman, like any manager, must watch the budget. He must try to accomplish his goals with an eye for both moral and nonmoral restrictions. Obviously, he intends to pick the solution with the greatest moral value and fewest nonmoral liabilities such as the more expensive solutions.

Both the first and second solutions contain the possibility that someone might resign, which means that poor Gillman would be in worse shape than he is now. Gillman's original management problem is to staff the library; if someone quits, his ability to carry out his original task is severly limited. The possibility of imminent resignation is an important nonmoral liability to be considered.

Now it is time to decide what is good and bad about each solution, i.e. the positive and negative moral values produced by a solution.

Values: After noting solutions, their outcomes and nonmoral liabilities we must consider the important aspect of values. Solutions uphold or compromise particular values. We make charitable contributions, for example, to uphold the values of worth and autonomy of our fellow human beings. A value is compromised when an action limits the worthiness of something; say, when the autonomy of someone is limited by slavery. No proper decision can be made unless all the positive and negative values are considered. Thus, the V in the formula suggests what values are upheld and what values are compromised by a particular solution:

Principle of human worth-human life is inherently valuable; one ought to support, not destroy human lives.

Principle of nonmaleficence--one should not harm others.

Principle of autonomy - people ought to be free to act independently as long as someone else's rights are not violated.

Principle of justice - one ought act fairly to others.

Principle of lawfulness - one ought to obey the law.

Principle of confidentially - one ought not betray professional secrets or confidences.

Principle of veracity - one ought to tell the truth.

Principle of role/duty - act according to your role; do your part.

Principle of fidelity - keep promises and act faithfully.

(There are many sources of values; most of us are familiar with particular values as discussed at home, in school or church. The Bible is a source of value from which we get the ten commandments; Plato and Aristotle are also sources of values. There is nothing sacred about the list provided above. This list, as with many others, ought to provoke thought about values in general. We see how such a list provokes thought in the application to our current case.)

In the first solution Gillman simply requires the women to work the scheduled hours; we ask: what values are upheld and what values are compromised by this solution?

It seems that the principle of justice is upheld by the first solution: employees share the burdens equally, without regard to their sex. But this is the only value upheld; the compromised values are greater.

If the women work late at night, they could be attacked and hurt or even killed. If these outcomes occur, our solution compromised the values of nonmaleficence and human worth, even if no attacks occur, the value of autonomy is violated since the women's right to freedom from fear is compromised. (Autonomy must include safe employment). Lastly, we might include justice as a value compromised, since the women are required to work in circumstances in which they alone are particularily vulnerable. (Notice that justice is listed as both a value upheld and a value compromised: the solution treats the men fairly but it treats the women unfairly).

Few values come into play in the second solution: requiring the men to work all the late shifts. On the positive side, the values of nonmaleficence and autonomy are upheld, since the women are protected from harm and the fear of harm. On the negative side, justice is compromised, since the men are required to work the late shifts. A greater number of positive values occur in the third solution.

Suppose Gillman hires a temporary employee to work all the late night shifts. This solution requires none of the regular employees to work the extra time, and thus, promotes many values not found in the earlier solutions. Still this solution contains a potential liability which might adversely affect values depending on whether a man or a woman is hired.

If a man applies for an gets the job, the values of nonmaleficence, autonomy and justice are upheld. Nonmaleficence is upheld because our present solution protects the female employees from physical harm. Autonomy is upheld because the women are freed from the fear caused by the late working hours. Justice is upheld on two counts: the men need not work more than their fair share of late hours and the women are not unfairly placed in risk.

If a woman applies for and gets the job, the negative values of the first solution occur (i.e. nonmaleficence, human worth, autonomy and justice) because a female employee is being placed in jeopardy.

Gillman cannot discriminate against a woman and hire a man to do the late work; nor can he expect a woman to work late without adequate protection. Thus, the wide range of negative values that might occur if Gillman hires extra help, places this solution on a low priority.

A fourth solution suggests that Gillman work the employees in pairs for their mutual protection. This solution produces all of the

positive values, but none of the negatives, of the earlier solution. Since two people work each late shift physical harm is avoided (nonmaleficence), freedom from fear is provided (autonomy) and all parties are being treated equally (justice). In terms of values alone, this is the best solution yet.

The fifth solution recommends Gillman have a security guard escort the women to their cars at night. Again, the values of nonmaleficence, autonomy and justice are upheld, without the negatives of the first, second and third solutions.

Evaluations: In the last step we assess the values and liabilities of each solution to make a final decision. We know, for example, that the fourth and fifth solutions produce the greatest number of positive values with the fewest negatives. Moreover, the fifth solution lacks the liabilities of the fourth solution, which makes the fifth solution the best choice.

FIRST SOLUTION

Solution: Do nothing. Require the women to work their fair share of late shifts, inform them that personal security to and from work is not a matter of the library's concern.

Outcomes: (A) Some of the women might be attacked and hurt leaving the library so late at night.

(B) Some of the women might quit.

(C) Nothing might happen, except that the women continue to fear for their safety after hours.

Liabilities: The only clear nonmoral limitation to this solution is found in Outcome B. Clearly, if anyone quits the original staffing problem is compounded.

Values:

Positive

The following values are upheld:

Justice - the men do not have to work any more than their fair share of late shifts.

Negative

The following values are violated:

nonmaleficence - an employee could get hurt in Outcome A.

Human Worth - it is possible an employee could be killed in an attack in Outcome A.

Autonomy - independence of action must include freedom from fear. That freedom is clearly violated in Outcome C. Secondly, the freedom to choose employment is violated if one must quit to insure one's personal safety.

Justice - one might well wonder if it is truly fair to make some employees work under circumstances when they are particularly vulnerable.

Evaluations: Surely there is a better solution than this. The negative values clearly outweigh the positive. Moreover, the nonmoral limitation is a likely possibility. Gillman is short-handed as it is; if someone quits, his initial difficulty is dramatically increased. Let's look for a solution with greater positive values and fewer limitations.

SECOND SOLUTION

Solution: Make the men work the extra late shifts.

Outcomes: Some of the men might resign over the alledged unfairness of the situation.

Liabilities: If some of the men resign, the original staffing problem is compounded.

Values:	Positive	Negative
	The following values are upheld:	The following values are violated:
	nonmaleficence - the women employees are protected.	Justice - the men are required to work extra late shifts without due compensation for their extra burden
	Autonomy - the women can keep their jobs without fear of harm.	

Evaluations: More values are upheld in this solution. The men may receive unfair treatment, but the women are kept from harm and unnecessary fear for their safety. The trade is not bad: still the ongoing problem is compounded by non moral liabilities. If anyone quits, the initial problem is made worse.

A better solution would have a smaller liability.

THIRD SOLUTION

Solution: Hire a temporary employee to work all of the late night shifts.

Outcomes: Nothing might happen. The extra employee works the night shift without incidence.

Liabilities: (A) There is an additional cost in training a temporary employee.

(B) Suppose only women apply for the job. We would have to hire a woman to avoid discrimination. But this solution fails to resolve the original difficulty: we are responsible for her safety.

Values:	Positive	Negative
	The following values are upheld:	The following values are compromised:
	If a man is hired, we can retain the positive values in Solutions 1 and 2	If a women is hired, we face the negative values in Solution 1.

Evaluations: We cannot legally or morally hire a man for the extra work and exlude a woman from the job. Even if we warn the woman of possible harm and she still takes the job, we are responsible for her safety. This solution is not workable.

FOURTH SOLUTION

Solution: Have students work the late shift in pairs. They will leave together at night for mutual protection.

Outcomes: (A) The men originally complained of having to work extra shifts; this gripe is compounded by the solution.

(B) Nothing might happen. The employees will work the extra duties and protect each other after work.

Liabilities: (A) The cost of employment during the week of late work is doubled.

(B) Some of the men might resign, if asked to work late. The original staffing problem is thereby compounded.

Values:	Positive	Negative
	The following values are upheld:	The following values are compromised:
	nonmaleficence-Employees are protected from bodily harm.	NONE
	Autonomy-Employees work without fear of bodily harm.	
	Justice-The women are not singled out to work in a potentially harmful situation.	

Evaluations: This solution emphasizes the positive values without incurring the negatives. Except for the nonmoral liabilities, this is the best solution yet.

FIFTH SOLUTION

Solution: Have campus security guard escort students to their cars at night.

Outcomes: Nothing might happen. The students have protection.

Liabilities: NONE

Values:

Positive	Negative
The following values are upheld:	The following values are compromised:
nonmaleficance-Employees are protected from bodily harm.	NONE
Autonomy-Employees work without fear of bodily harm.	
Justice-The women are not singled out to work in a potentially harmful situation.	

NB: This solution contains all the values of the fourth solution.

Evaluations: This is the recommended solution. It has no liabilities. It incurrs all positive values with no negative values.

SUMMARY OF OUR CONCLUSIONS

TO THE GILLMAN CASE

At first look this case appears to be a simple matter of reverse discrimination: the female student aides in a university library demand to be exempted from extra duties. The male aides, who would have to pick up the slack of their feminine cohorts, argue that they should not be asked to bear the extra burden simply because they are men. However, the issue involves more than a simple matter of discrimination: the extra duty is a late night shift and the women fear for their safety outside the building so late at night.

None of the seven employees, three of which are women, have to work more than one late night; hiring one extra employee for the late shift is costly in terms of time and money for training someone for so short a duty. Moreover, the problem is unresolved if a woman should apply for the temporary duty: we could not legally exclude women from the position and if a woman were hired, we would still face the original difficulty.

Two more solutions immediately come to mind: we could do nothing and merely demand the women work the late shifts or we could support the women's claim and demand the men work the late shifts. If we do nothing and demand that the women work late we could indeed be endangering their safety. Of course, there is a chance that the women could work without incident; still we must consider their fears. Important moral principles are sacrificed if we force employees to work in fear of their health or safety. Requiring the men to work the late shifts is a solution that is a marginal improvement.

An effort to pursue justice by having one sex or the other work late fails because the burden must fall unfairly to one or the other. The value upheld to one party in either of these solutions is lost to the other party. So, neither of these solutions is favored from a moral viewpoint. Furthermore, both of these solutions suffer the nonmoral liability that some employees might resign and thereby compound the original difficulty.

A fourth solution recommends that the student aides pair up for mutual late night protection. Many values are upheld by this solution: employees will be protected from bodily harm, employees have independence to pursue their work without fear, and justice is done since no one is singled out for extra work or potential bodily harm. This solution, however, has significant nonmoral liabilities. Employing two students to do the work of one is costly, and again, the extra work might precipitate a resignation from an overworked employee. Thus, we recommend yet another solution.

We should ask the college's security department to assign a guard to meet the employee leaving the library at 1 a.m. The guard's rounds can be easily rescheduled so that our needs are met. This solution incurs none of the liabilities found in other solutions and provides us with positive values found in the fourth solution.

Practice Cases

A moral dilemma, by definition, involves a conflict of values. Properly used, SOLVE will demonstrate the conflict inherent in a moral dilemma in terms of the positive and negative values, and thereby aid the decision-maker in choosing a right course of action. The following case studies are examples of conflicts of values.

The following cases should be used to practice the use of SOLVE. All nine values discussed earlier are listed with each case for the user's convience.

(I am always looking for new cases. If you have an idea for a case demonstrating a conflict of values, please send it to me: Max M. Thomas, Philosophy Department, Delta College, University Center, Michigan 48710.)

CALL SIGNS

Eve manages a radio station in a small town. One day she notices that an occasional advertiser, Uncle Ulysses Used Cars, has just received a large shipment of Ford Fidos. Now, Eve knows that Uncle Ulysses has to buy air time and advertise so that he can move the new cars. It is not uncommon for the price of air time to fluctuate. Since Uncle Ulysses is over a barrel, so to speak, Eve wonders if she should sell the time to him at 15% above the very profitable standard rate.

1. Principle of human worth:

2. Principle of nonmaleficence:

3. Principle of autonomy:

4. Principle of justice:

5. Principle of lawfulness:

6. Principle of confidentially:

7. Principle of veracity:

8. Principle of role/duty:

9. Principle of fidelity:

THE HIGHEST BID

George owns a small furniture factory employing eight people. Six of his employees have families with small children; George himself has two boys and three girls all below the age of fourteen.

Business is bad and George is facing bankruptcy. The company can be saved, however, if George wins the bid to build antique-like furniture to fill a local museum. While in the museum one day George discovers the secret bids of his competition in an unattended office. One peek in the envelope and George can save his company eight jobs. What should he do?

1. Principle of human worth:

2. Principle of nonmaleficence:

3. Principle of autonomy:

4. Principle of justice:

5. Principle of lawfulness:

6. Principle of confidentially:

7. Principle of veracity:

8. Principle of role/duty:

9. Principle of fidelity:

BELLY UP TO THE BAR

Kelly Kane has just got a big promotion which includes a larger territory. One of his new clients, Mr. Abel, is an alcoholic who expects to be treated to a big dinner with many drinks.

Kane discovers that the normally astute and cautious Mr. Abel tends to sign big orders after several drinks. Kane needs to make a good showing to maintain his promotion and, as it so happens, he is scheduled to meet with Abel next week. What sort of entertainment should Kane plan?

1. Principle of human worth:

2. Principle of nonmaleficence:

3. Principle of autonomy:

4. Principle of justice:

5. Principle of lawfulness:

6. Principle of confidentially:

7. Principle of role/duty:

8. Principle of veracity:

9. Principle of fidelity:

FLOUR MILLS

Ben is an advertising salesman for a national trade journal. This month the editor of the journal decides to run a story on cooking. Ben decides he can sell advertising to flour companies.

Ben sells an ad to Pillsbury and makes an appointment to see a representative of General Mills. General Mills promises to buy an ad only if Pillsbury has bought one. Ben faces a conflict: Pillsbury wants to be the only flour advertiser in the magazine: they would not want Ben to tell General Mills that they have bought an ad. General Mills does not want Pillsbury to be represented alone in the magazine, which is why they will buy if Pillsbury has already purchased advertising space. Should Ben tell General Mills that Pillsbury has bought an ad?

1. Principle of human worth:

2. Principle of nonmaleficence:

3. Principle of autonomy:

4. Principle of justice:

5. Principle of lawfulness:

6. Principle of confidentially:

7. Principle of veracity:

8. Principle of role/duty:

9. Principle of fidelity:

WHO'S ON FIRST?

Imagine, says Dale, my commission for this month would double if both companies bought our new left-handed spring boxes. But there is a catch.

The two companies are very competitive but equally reluctant to invest in new technology. Hastings, Inc. promises to buy only if Western, Inc. buys, and Western will buy only if Hastings does. On the drive back, Dale realizes the log jam needs to be broken. He toys with the idea of telling Hastings that Western has placed an order; Hastings will buy and Western will then follow suit. What should Dale do?

1. Principle of human worth:

2. Principle of nonmaleficence:

3. Principle of autonomy:

4. Principle of justice:

5. Principle of lawfulness:

6. Principle of confidentially:

7. Principle of veracity:

8. Principle of role/duty:

9. Principle of fidelity:

TOEING THE LINE

Tammy likes her new job at the Colonel Motors plant. She has the family routine task of putting the radiator cap on completed radiators as they pass by. She is also supposed to stop the line if she sights any flaw in a radiator on the line.

One day she notices a hair line fissure in a radiator. She reaches down to pull the lever which stops the line, but she hesitates upon remembering how much the supervison hates to have the line shut-down. If she shuts down today, it will be her third time this week; her employer expects an average of once a month. Rumor has it that the last employee lost her job from causing too many shut-downs. Tammy also realizes that a small crack in a radiator presents a nuience and a small repair bill for the car's owner. Should she shut-down the line?

1. Principle of human worth:

2. Principle of noamaleficence:

3. Principle of autonomy:

4. Principle of justice:

5. Principle of lawfulness:

6. Principle of confidentially:

7. Principle of veracity:

8. Principle of role/duty:

9. Principle of fidelity:

LOOKING GOOD

Gus sells food coloring to jelly bean manufacturers; part of his job is to represent his company at the annual convention of Jelly Bean Producers. This year the convention will close with a formal ball.

Gus will have to rent a tuxedo for the ball; his company, however, refuses to pay for the tux rental. Gus can either pay the rental from his own pocket or he can bury the charge in his expense account. (Assume no one will discover the bogus claim). What should Gus do?

1. Principle of human worth:

2. Principle of nonmaleficence:

3. Principle of autonomy:

4. Principle of justice:

5. Principle of lawfulness:

6. Principle of confidentiality:

7. Principle of veracity:

8. Principle of role/duty:

9. Principle of fidelity:

CREDIT CARD BLUES

Harry uses his VITA credit card for most of the business expense his company pays for. The company encourages the use of credit cards for business expenses but they refuse to reimburse interest charges accrued in the use of a credit card. Still, by the time Harry is reimbursed by the company, interest has been charged to his account. Now Harry can pay the interest out of his own pocket or he can bury the interest charges in his expense account with bogus claims. (N.B.: There is no chance the company will discover Harry's bogus claims.) What should he do?

1. Principle of human worth:

2. Principle of nonmaleficence:

3. Principle of autonomy:

4. Principle of justice:

5. Principle of lawfulness:

6. Princ[illegible]e of confidentially:

7. Principle of veracity:

8. P inciple of role/duty:

9. Principle of fidelity:

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